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STATEMENT BY SENATOR BOB DOLE -- KANSAS
BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENTS

APRIL 29, 1970

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss American Servicemen who are being held as prisoners of war and are missing in action in Southeast Asia.

TREATMENT OF AMERICAN PRISONERS

If there is one issue today in our country that truly transcends all differences, it is that of the treatment accorded captured United States personnel. The United States has always maintained a strict national policy of fair and civilized treatment for prisoners of war and Americans of all political and philosophical persuasions have expressed their outrage and indignation over the unconscionable attitude and actions of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese toward the prisoners in their hands. This Committee has received testimony which fully documents the humiliation and abuse to which captives have been subjected as well as the unpardonable manipulation of information on the status of prisoners and missing men.

These tactics strike a universal chord in all men of decency and honor, and we have seen the response in Congress. In the Senate and House, members from both parties have exerted determined efforts to obtain information about prisoners, exert Congressional authority and prestige in their behalf, and secure aid for their families. Any attempt to catalog the numerous endeavors by members of Congress would run a grave risk of omission, but I do wish to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. Chairman, to Members of the Committee, and to the whole House of Representatives for the role you have played. The Senate, also, has been involved in many efforts.

I would, however, take this opportunity to call the Committee's attention to recent events in which Congressional participation is playing a leading role.

MAY 1 TRIBUTE

To place these activities in perspective, I would recount a bit of personal history. On February 21, 1970, I attended a Constitution Hall "Freedom Rally" in support of prisoners of war. As you know, Constitution Hall is quite large. It can accommodate 3,811 people. Thus, you can imagine the disappointment of all involved in that event when only about 300 attended. Foremost among the disappointed were numerous wives of prisoners of war and men missing in action who were present as guests of honor.

That night I resolved that Constitution Hall would be filled to give voice to a ringing tribute to draw the attention of all men of conscience and compassion to the plight of these valiant Americans. May 1 was chosen as the date.

Soon after embarking on this undertaking, I realized that such a project would be extremely complex. To better organize and express this tribute, I enlisted the aid of six colleagues. The distinguished Majority Leader (MR. MANSFIELD), the Junior Senator from Arizona (MR. GOLDWATER), the Junior Senator from Colorado (MR. DOMINICK), the Junior Senator from Mississippi (MR. STENNIS), the Senior Senator from California (MR. MURPHY), and the Junior Senator from Maine (MR. MUSKIE) responded enthusiastically and have been most generous in their assistance.

Six members of the House of Representatives also joined us. They are MR. ROUDEBUSH of the Fifth District of Indiana, MR. TEAGUE of the Sixth District of Texas, MRS. MAY of the Fourth District of Washington, MR. DANIEL of the Fifth District of Virginia, MR. MCKNEALLY of the 27th District of New York, and MR. SIKES of the First District of Florida. Their participation has also been highly vigorous and valuable.

The tribute will be nonpartisan and nonideological. Those assisting represent both parties and hold differing political viewpoints, but we all agree American prisoners have not been treated in accordance with the 1949 Geneva Conventions. And we believe they deserve America's unwavering support, regardless of any differences over conduct of the war.

Plans for the May 1 Tribute have been arranged in consultation with Mrs. James B. Stockdale, Coronado, California, National Coordinator of the National League of Families of American Prisoners in Southeast Asia, and H. Ross Perot, a Dallas, Texas executive who has been instrumental in promoting international efforts for the release of Americans.

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Mrs. Stockdale and Mr. Perot agreed to serve as Honorary Co-chairmen for the event. We have received a response worthy of the men we seek to honor. Veterans organizations, civic groups and individual citizens have come forward volunteering every kind of assistance and support as well as seeking information about admission to the event.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTIONS OF CONGRESS

Although thirteen members of Congress have been directly associated in this effort, events of the past week have exemplified the interest and concern of all members. H.Con.Res. 582, expressing the sense of Congress concerning prisoners and missing servicemen, was brought up under suspension of the rules in both the House and Senate with the full cooperation of the Democratic and Republican leaderships. Its passage was secured in both bodies without objection.

Mr. Chairman, I request that H.Con.Res. 582 and its companion measure, S.Con.Res. 62, be printed in the hearing record following my statement. Incidentally, S.Con.Res. 62 is sponsored at the present time by 74 Senators.

APPEAL FOR INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

You will note that the Resolution calls for commemoration of May 1, 1970, as a day for an Appeal for International Justice for all American POW's and MIA's in Southeast Asia.

We entitled our tribute "An Appeal for International Justice" and chose the date of May 1 because that date has been designated "Law Day U.S.A." by a Joint Resolution of Congress which makes specific reference to the ideals of justice under law between nations.

We chose to declare our support for these missing and captive Americans within the context of Law Day to emphasize our belief in the rule of law, especially the law of nations as embodied in the 1949 Geneva Conventions on prisoners of war. These Conventions are the definitive statements in international law concerning treatment of prisoners of war, and both North Vietnam and the NLF have persistently and callously violated them, notwithstanding ratification by North Vietnam on June 28, 1957. Despite ratification and the clear language of the Conventions, Hanoi and the Viet Cong have committed the following calculated violations:

- They have refused to identify all American prisoners of war;
- They have denied to American prisoners of war the right to communicate regularly by mail with their families;
- They have refused to provide proper nourishment and humane treatment for all American prisoners of war, information on their detention camps and access by neutral observers; and
- They have continued to detain the seriously ill and wounded.

SATURDAY MEETING

On Saturday, May 2, the more than 700 wives and parents of POW's and MIA's from every part of the Country who are coming for the Friday ceremonies will hold a meeting in Washington of their organization, the National League of Families of Prisoners in Southeast Asia. As I mentioned earlier, Mrs. James B. Stockdale is their National Coordinator, and speaking from personal knowledge, I can attest to their courage and gallantry, especially that of the wives who have provided such invaluable help with the May 1 arrangements. They are keeping a long and solitary vigil, and, second only to the men whose watch they keep, they deserve the fullest measure of American support and encouragement.

DAY OF PRAYER

H.Con.Res. 582 provides a means by which the entire American public can demonstrate its backing for their countrymen who are captive or missing in Southeast Asia as well as for the families who wait for them. Point 4 of the Resolution Resolves: "That the President declare Sunday, May 3, 1970, a National Day of Prayer for humane treatment and safe return of these brave Americans."

The recent Day of Prayer for the safe return of the three Apollo 13 astronauts showed the depth of the concern Americans hold for those who carry our country's colors on distant and hazardous missions. I am sure a similar degree of concern and personal involvement will be shown for the fate of the 1,472 or more American servicemen who are captive or missing in Southeast Asia.

No more fitting culmination could be found for this weekend's activities. The efforts of the Appeal for International Justice and the meeting of the National League of Families can be joined on a massive basis by every American in his personal meditations and worship on Sunday.

Hopefully, the interest stimulated by these and other efforts will endure and grow. Hopefully, they will provide some measure of comfort and encouragement to the wives and families.

But our greatest hope is that our prayers will be answered and our men will be released and return to their loved ones and countrymen.